

AN ESSAY ON  
POETICS

THADDEUS REAMY BRENTON

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# *An Essay on Poetics*

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M.A.



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Tout passe. — L'art robuste  
Seul a l'éternité.

Le buste  
Survit à la cité.

Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent.  
Mais les vers souverains  
Demeurent  
Plus forts que les airains.

Sculpte, lime, cisèle ;  
Que ton rêve flottant  
Se scelle  
Dans le bloc résistant !

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER





## FOREWORD

‘**Y**OU did me the honour, I think, of suggesting that I should write a foreword to the book. I should be very pleased to do so, should you still wish it. . . . The book is a most able and thorough and suggestive piece of work, and I should be very willing to say so in print. At the same time I confess that no book seems to me to stand less in need of a preface than yours : it commends itself. And I confess too that the practice of bringing in another hand to write a preface to a book which *ought* to commend itself is not, in my opinion, desirable ; and when the book is of such clear excellence as yours, the preface-writer is apt to cut a somewhat impertinent figure. Still, as I say, if you still wish it, I will be this impertinent and unnecessary person, the introducer of your book.’

LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

LONDON

*Good Friday, 1932*





## AN ESSAY ON POETICS

**A**LL real art follows established form. Art in good part is skill guided by certain rules, the principles and prescribed regulations concerning the formation of correct design from dexterity. The word comes from the Latin *ars*, *artis*, used by Cicero in the sense of 'the method or way'.

Accepted form is the one thing in our world in which little or nothing is accorded through chance. Chance, according to Aristotle, is, 'the Negation of Art and Intelligence, and of Nature as an organizing force. Its essence is disorder, absence of design, want of regularity. It even borders on the non-existent. Its <sup>clear</sup> sphere is that wide domain of life which baffles foresight, defies reason, abounds in surprises: and also those regions of Nature where we meet with abortive efforts, mistakes, strange and monstrous growths, which are the "failures of the principle of design".'<sup>1</sup>

Form becomes established and purged of chance through years, or perhaps it were better to say centuries, of trial. *It* becomes orthodox through profound testing at the hands of, and

<sup>1</sup> Butcher, S. H., *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, The Macmillan Company.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

long acceptance by, the right people, those people of sound scholarly attainments; of long, inbred, genuine culture; of fine experience in the intricacies of traditions; of practised restraint which at last allows freedom of choice. Then, through correct acceptance, endurance, and its own repetition, form becomes sacred.

‘In a sonata by Mozart every sound has a place and a meaning; in a Greek marble there is nothing confused or raucous or awry.’<sup>1</sup> In a poem such as Malherbe’s *Paraphrase du psaume CXLV* every line length, applied principle of balance and division, variation in foot pattern, shade of rime, use of caesura, employment of artistic repetition, and plan of euphonicalness has a place and definite purpose. ‘How different from experience, where there are whole days in life without meaning, and how many lives without meaning in the world.’<sup>2</sup>

Whole days of seeming emptiness need meaning and a filling orderliness supplied for them. After having grasped beauty through the meaning in the order, pleasantness, and evenness of those artists who have attended that one tangibility in our universe which knows not the elements of negation or wants of regularity, the very disorder of life becomes negligible, and our avowed respect for experience a thing inviolable.

<sup>1</sup> Edman, Irwin, *Richard Kane Looks at Life*, Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



## *An Essay on Poetics*

The open door of beauty is closely framed ; even like the needle's eye, it is difficult of passage. One sees clearly in direct proportion to what he has experienced. The highly idealized face of any statue of the Hellenic period may seem to that individual who has neither studied nor experienced the canons of classical art but a stolid mask no human face ever resembled ; the aggregate of bodily perfections strikes no chord in the unimaginative mind which has thought only in terms of individual imperfection. Goethe voices the precept that one sees clearly in direct proportion to what he has experienced :

Wer den Dichter will verstehen  
Muss in Dichters Lande gehen.<sup>1</sup>

✓ The appreciation of a Sappho fragment demands years of background in the study and experience of the elemental and involved dynamics of poetry. To the average layman the science of etymology is an unbelievably barren thing, fit only for the dilettante dabbling of episcene men who would be useless in any other field of endeavour. The opera is fury and rather comical sound without one's background of the forms and traditions of music ; the symphony is an occasion for ennui. If we are fortunate to have mastered some counterpoint, parts of the *Well Tempered Clavichord*, and a sonata or

<sup>1</sup> *Noten und Abhandlungen auf den Westöstlichen Diwan.*

## *An Essay on Poetics*

so, we may have the privilege of appreciation of beauty through our assumption of part knowledge of the recognized canons of musical measurement. Consciousness of art brings growth.

The individual must not mistake, however, those many 'strange and monstrous growths', both long hanging at hand and rapidly arising, for experiences conducive to an establishment of meaning in his life. In order to sight beauty out of vacancy one must experience real beauty proportionately. Real beauty neither arises as a mushroom growth, a fungus appearing overnight, nor as a parasite existing on a host. Beauty is not a *fata Morgana* radiant in its own isolated light. Beauty is something fully established, appearing reincarnated, but not sporadic in the field of experience. Form has endured the millennium. It is in following forms through personal creation that the artist becomes a part of all that he has met and the fusion leaves us beauty and elegance.

The misconstruing of the word beauty has partially arisen through a negation of intelligence regarding originality. Real originality does not consist in the breaking down of all old forms and established traditions; it consists merely of the working over of forms, questioning habitual relationships of minor factors, and working out new possible relationships. Every effort can be made towards the assertion of



## *An Essay on Poetics*

originality without damaging the boundary lines of beauty and elegance. An artist may assert himself, but, phrasing Ovid, there are, nevertheless, sacred matters held in common by artists, however much each one follows his own different road.

Beauty and originality must not be confused with untruths. Charlatanism has flourished in every century, but we seem to have a preponderance of it in this twentieth. Part of our charlatanry is an heritage; most of it is of recent growth. The rationally inexplainable Cubists, Impressionists, and Moderns fill our galleries. Our concert programmes are replete with elaborate explanations of compositions which when heard leave the spirits of the conservative hearer along with the music, on the borders of the non-existent. Scholarship, that professed among academic people, is of little depth and substance. The length and breadth of the world of the arts and humanities seem to be ravaged by a great epidemic of superficiality and absence of accepted sound design. Perhaps most modern music, painting, sculpture, and letters are the outcome of mistaken idealism, rather than of stark charlatanism which results from false appreciation and lack of mastery. There is the possibility of this to some degree. Then it is to be hoped that those persons worshipping without reason or scholarship or a long background of restraint in a cult before these



## *An Essay on Poetics*

disorders which are inexplicable intelligently will awaken, and not perish Brutuses.

Among the arts which have suffered loss of beauty through the removal of their heritage, meaning in order, pleasantness and evenness, poetry has sustained heavy deprivation. The Imagists and writers of free verse, or *vers libres*, have done strange things; their very assumption of having done something new is strange and a reflection on their scholarly attainment. The *Shirath Shirim* (*Song of Solomon*) is magnificent in language and in figures, but the verse is probably as free as that produced by any of the Moderns. The earliest Japanese poems have no set metre. Littmann<sup>1</sup> pertinently remarks that in many of the popular Arabic poems which he has collected there is an absence of definite verse-measure. East Africans have no metrical songs but sing in recitative.<sup>2</sup> Early English writers used an exaggerated rhythm instead of true poetical metre. This is seen in Old English poems such as *Beowulf*, and the poems of Cædmon and Cynewulf, which employ many of the conventions of real poetry with the exception of our established metre. These earlier poets are fully absolved of their error when the reader considers the period in which they wrote, with its extremely limited current learning and bareness of precedent. It is not so easy to give

<sup>1</sup> *Zeitschrift für die alttest. Wissenschaft.*

<sup>2</sup> Wallaschek, *Primitive Music*, p. 11.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

absolution to the flagrant flaunting of the established traditions practised very wilfully by our contemporary composer of free verse.

The Modern in poetry voices the philosophy expressed in Richard Hovey's lines :

Off with the fetters  
That chafe and restrain :  
Off with the chain.

It seems as if the chain consists of many links. Some of these are : proper sentence structure, euphony, rime, caesura, rational balance and division, the canon of elegance, and, of greatest detestation in the Modern's ears, metre and all intricacies connected therewith.

The terms *metre* and *rhythm* are in no way interchangeable. Rhythm is by no means the invention of man or the discovery of the poet. If, in general, rhythm aside from metre is a poetical tenet, it is only secondary to, and superimposed upon, metre.

There is an universality of rhythm which is catholic in its interest.

To-day the peace of autumn pervades the world.  
In the radiant noon, silent and motionless, the wide stillness rests like a tired bird spreading over the deserted fields to all horizons its wings of golden-green.

To-day the thin thread of the river flows without song, leaving no mark on its sandy banks.

The many distant villages bask in the sun with eyes closed in idle and languid slumber.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

In the stillness, I hear in every blade of grass, in every speck of dust, in every part of my own body, in the visible and invisible worlds, in the planets, the sun, and the stars, the joyous dance of the atoms through endless time . . . the myriad murmuring waves of rhythm surrounding Thy throne.<sup>1</sup>

We agree with Robert Lynd regarding the child from the age at which he learns to beat a silver spoon on the table.

He likes to make not only a noise, but a noise with something of the regularity of an echo. Later on, he himself trots gloriously in reins with bells that jingle in rhythm as he runs. His pleasure in swings, in sitting behind a horse, in travelling in a train, with its puff as regular as an uncle's watch and its wheels thundering out endless hexameters on the lines, arises from the same delight in rhythm . . . Cynics may pretend that it is nurses and foolish parents who invent the language of babyhood. It is the child, however, who feels that double sound does not mean enough till it has rhymed itself double, and who of its own accord will gravely murmur '*caw-caw*' to a scratching hen or '*wow-wow*' to a dog with expectant eyes and ears.

The child's very body is rhythmically made, the two arms balancing one another from opposite shoulders. When he walks his right arm swings forward as he advances his left foot. One side of the body works rhythmically with the other; the effect is a perfect co-ordination.

<sup>1</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

The great pulsation of the blood through all the ramifications of the arterial system, the measured pumping of the lung bellows, the rhythmical discharge of tiny glands in everlasting darkness—and life in the elemental is merely a rhythmical process.

The world seen objectively beats past the human eye in a variety of movements going to make up the ponderous pulsation of the universe. The surf surges in, breaks, and the great throat of the sea sucks it back. The brush of pine-needles sways like the hand of sleep. Leaves and sprays of leaves hang in a spaced succession, leading the eye in a rhythmical progression to take in the whole of the design. The thrush repeats his measured call, fearing that man may think he cannot 'recapture the first fine careless rapture'. Spring and Summer and Fall and Winter follow endlessly, beating an interminable path. The moon waxing and waning regulates the spawning of the sea urchin, and the heavenly bodies beating off the circle of the zodiac complete the cycles of infinitude.

There is a natural desire for rhythmical expression. The primitive savage claps two stones together and without surprise discovers the most elemental of rhythms, *clap-clap-clap-clap*, a measured succession of regular blows separated by measured intervals. An inherent desire for accent gives rise to pattern: *CLAP-clap-*



## *An Essay on Poetics*

*clap-clap*, CLAP-*clap-clap-clap*. Finally a charming intoxicating stimulus is evolved: CLAP-CLAP-*clap*, *clap*, *clap*, CLAP-CLAP-*clap*, *clap*, *clap*. Before the Feast of the Rice Harvest the tom-tom beats from the overhanging mountains, beats incessantly for hours, and the inhabitants of the *barrio* from the oldest man to the very young man become pulsating centres of response.

This natural desire for rhythmical expression carried over into practicality by primitive people is exemplified in the role which rhythm plays in rice-culture in the Philippine Islands. The Oriental thinks in terms of rice, and the Filipino regards music as another essential. In his country the fisherman, the sailor, the beggar has his working-song. Before the advent of modern transportation the trades person who carried his merchandise to the market walked in steady time to the shrilling of his bamboo harmonium. It should not seem strange for the rice farmer to employ rhythm in connexion with his profession. However, when for the first time one passes a group of paddies where many women are busily engaged in transplanting the seedlings of rice into the soft wet mud, and sees a solitary gentleman, apparently unaware of the progression of work at his feet, standing safely on a high dike and strumming a lively tune on his *bandurria*, one readily remarks about tropical indolence. But when it becomes evident that the busy hand of each



## *An Essay on Poetics*

singing planter moves in perfect time with her neighbour's, and that the bodies of the planters move rhythmically back through the mud according to the beat of the rhythmical measures, one gasps and remarks that there must be something new under the sun. But the role of rhythm in the rice-culture of the Philippines is as old as the *buyo* custom. No one knows how long the Malay has chewed betel, and no one can tell you when some of the rhythms which are used at present in the rice-fields were first sung. If the farm owner is exceedingly poor, the people will depend upon their vocal efforts alone, but any farmer is wise enough to realize that a musician will both attract helpers and hasten work. When the transplanters, women in the vast majority, assemble, they may find anything from the solitary musician with his guitar to an orchestra awaiting them. At the field, upon the rhythm maker, or makers, taking a place on a dike, the planters, each provided with a bunch of seedlings for the left hand, arrange themselves in symmetrical rows along the edges of the paddies. A moment of waiting, and then the familiar strains of a harvest-song come from the dike. Lusty voices are readily added to this instrumentation, and the work begins in earnest.

Mag pugas sa buntag,  
Mag pugas sa hapon;  
Atong pa abuton ang alanihon.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

(*Chorus*)

Ang alanihon,  
Ang alanihon,  
Atong pa abuton ang alanihon.<sup>1</sup>

Bodies bend in strict count, the left hands inserting the seedlings and the right hands covering the roots, as the rows of workers move steadily backward. The heat of the tropical sun, discomfort of the oozing mud, and physical strain are lessened by the mechanical performance, and the faster the rhythm moves, the faster the seedlings are inserted. At harvest, red and purple skirts swing among the weaving yellow rice, and the broad *nipa* hats like giant golden mushrooms dot the field. The swinging sound of sickles and the tinkle of cut panicles are in time to the melodies of ancient harvest-songs. Some of them are beautiful in their simplicity.

Sowing in the morning,  
Sowing in the evening,  
We shall be waiting for the harvesting.

(*Chorus*)

For the harvesting,  
For the harvesting,  
We shall be waiting for the harvesting.<sup>2</sup>

Dance, from response to the tom-tom to such work as that of the Greek chorus, consists of a purely rhythmical reaction. Rhythm is the basis

<sup>1</sup> Harvest-song in the Visayan dialect.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from the Visayan dialect.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

of primitive drama, which consists of pantomime, song, and dance; response to rhythm was one of the chief characteristics of the Greek people of the Hellenic period. The work of Pavlova and that of the Ballet Russe combine many kinds of free rhythm into that of the ballet. Music, the dovetailed motion of the colour wheel, perfect bodily movement, and the undulation of light flow down a symmetry as fearful as that of Blake's tiger.

Rhythm plays a notable part in the ritual of religious rites. The head-hunters come home, weary from the chase and gory with its blood. Rites must attend the new possessions. The heads are placed in rows, to be fed the all-succouring rice food. The hunters sing, in free verse to be sure—one would expect that of head-hunters—and this rhythmical performance makes the bringing in of new trophies a ritual, a mystic ceremony, and a justification grand. It is only a few steps to St. Peter's. The chant repeats itself in lovely recurring *motif*, the censer swings, the purple incense curls in graceful waves, the candles gleam from their graduated branches, the golden robe held out by the acolytes undulates, and the rhythms of colour, light, sound, and movement make three hundred million people drunk.

Rhythm must have been abundantly inherent in the lives of the cathedral builders. Goethe's architecture of frozen music can be seen at

## *An Essay on Poetics*

Rheims, Amiens, Tours, Lichfield, and especially at Chartres with her exquisite sculpture, point-lace in stone. From point to pinnacle, up to the great rose window, up to the tiniest fret, back under the gargoyles' smirk, and around in perfect succession the eye is led to take in the whole. A gradation of colour in the stained glass windows, a restful row of mellowed saints, each arranged to carry your eye unto the figure at his side—the ensemble never impresses you as stone or mass or bulk ; it is something which creates a rhythm in the vision, something which sings of God. The Spaniards neglected rhythm. They boasted to build at Seville a cathedral so large that man would say it was impossible. It is.

The Temple of Heaven in the once Forbidden City of the Manchus is built on the pattern of nine and the multiples of nine. This periodical recurrence leads up to the bronze circle, a platform which was the centre of the universe, the Heart of things. The Chinese symbol for rhythm might well be translated metre or form. Three thousand years of supreme culture built itself on form.

Agathon did not see one metope of the Parthenon, one figure in the eastern pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. His eye was led through all the joys of procession, and from the reclining spectator in the triangular end of the pediment group, past crouching figures,



## *An Essay on Poetics*

chariots, horses, and standing figures, straight into the gaze of the great All-Father of the earth.

Regular and balanced movement caught in Parian marble by Myron have made the *Discolobus* live for over two thousand years. The graceful maiden in bas-relief<sup>1</sup> ties her sandal as if she had stooped but with this breath instead of centuries ago. The poorest copy of the Nike of Samothrace retains some of that rhythm imprisoned by the sculptor in the original figure which stood on the ploughing ship, her glorious shoulders and wind-lashed garments buffeting the heavy spray.

Edwin Austin Abbey's 'End of the First Act of King Lear' (Metropolitan Museum) shows a most astounding arrangement of rhythmical lines which lead the eye and thought in a definite direction. At the left of the picture stand Goneril and Regan. Massed with a group at the right are Lear, the Fool, and a wolfhound. Every line in the picture pulls both eye and thought toward that dreadful moor of cracking wind. The body of the wolfhound is an arrow pointing to Lear's destiny.

Leonardo da Vinci felt that the subject as well as the artist should be cognizant of rhythm at the moment of painting in order that the composition might be builded right. A violinist

<sup>1</sup> The Nike adjusting her sandal, from the 'Balustrade' of the Athena Nike temple (Akropolis Museum, Athens).



## *An Essay on Poetics*

played during the sittings of 'Mona Lisa'. The Florentine painters based all composition on form. Botticelli's 'Venus' is sadly lacking in colour, but printed in black and white the faultless rhythm of the figure makes it live. Florentine painters who turned sculptors were better sculptors than painters because they were concerned primarily with form and rhythm, and their paintings are practically sculpture on canvas. In the work of Michelangelo, a sculptor who turned painter, in the Cappella Sistina each *figura decorativa* seems to have the massiveness and ponderous rhythm of a marble.

This universality of rhythm, free, for example, in nature, industry, the dance, and religious ritual, and caught in marble or pigment, evidences various degrees of measurement, but in no case, with the possible exception of the Chinese arts, do we find such order, precision of design in repetition, regularity, and lack of surprise as are demanded in the *metre* of music and poetry, demanded through the canons of the sacredness, tried beauty, and elegance of form. Metre is a rhythmical progression, in poetry always accurately measured by iambs, trochees, dactyls or anapaests, interspersed with spondees, amphibrachs, and pyrrhics, and cut into patterns ranging from a monometer to an octometer. The word arose in the Sanskrit *mā*, to measure. Rhythm is progression, universally evident, showing a recurrence of fundamental

## *An Essay on Poetics*

arrangement of detail not accurately graduated but variable according to no set canons. The root word is Greek  $\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ , to flow. The original meanings of the root words help to make evident the distinct difference between our words, 'metre' and 'rhythm'. When the writer of free verse shakes off the shackles of metre and attempts to substitute rhythm, pronounced though it may be, he has departed entirely from poetry into universality, and his product ceases to be a poem and becomes merely one of the waves in this already over-pulsating universe.

Upon seeing in print a selection of free verse, the question which always becomes foremost in the mind of the reader is that one asking why the selection must be arranged in those non-sensical ever-varying lines.

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

It sits looking  
over harbour and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.<sup>1</sup>

There are no units of measurement employed here, no anapaests or dactyls, no pentameter or dimeter plans, no logical reasons for balance and division.

The answer of the writers invariably states that the lines are too rhythmical for prose.

<sup>1</sup> Sandburg, Carl, *Fog*.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

Ezra Pound writes this and calls it poetry :

The apparition of these faces in the crowd ;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.<sup>1</sup>

D. H. Lawrence writes two sentences and calls them prose :

She was the daughter of a miller at the upper end of the lake. Her hair was red like beech leaves in a wind.<sup>2</sup>

To complicate matters comes the hybrid of questionable parentage. Words fail as to the placement of five lines from Robert Nichols's *The Assault* :

A wail.  
Lights. Blurr.  
Gone.  
On, on. Lead. Lead. Hail.  
Spatter. Whirr ! Whirr !

At least, the creation is appropriately titled. We think of many other words which we might include in the category. We also find that such a thing as an old-fashioned sentence, containing at least a subject and a verb, has been relegated, through new insurgence, to the graveyard of all orthodox things.

It is an astounding thing that some of the writers of free verse do not know that there is

<sup>1</sup> *In the Station of the Metro.*

<sup>2</sup> 'A Fragment of Stained Glass', *The Prussian Officer*, Huebsch, 1916.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

no limit to the amount of rhythm which may be evidenced in prose so long as metre, an entirely different factor dealing in trochees, monometers, spondees, and the like necessary mechanisms, does not intrude. It must be true that if the writing of the advocates of free verse is too rhythmical for prose, some of our best prose is necessarily *vers libres*.

The quotation of one speech, typical of the whole, from Wilde's romantic drama *Salome* evidences prose with a cadence which the writers of free verse have surely not exceeded.

Ton corps est blanc comme le lis d'un pré que le faucheur n'a jamais fauché. Ton corps est blanc comme les neiges qui couchent sur les montagnes de Judée, et descendent dans les vallées. Les roses du jardin de la reine d'Arabie ne sont pas aussi blanches que ton corps. Ni les roses du jardin de la reine d'Arabie, ni les pieds de l'aurore qui trépignent sur les feuilles, ni le sein de la lune quand elle couche sur le sein de la mer. . . . Il n'y a rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps. Laisse-moi toucher ton corps !

Thy body is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows which lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she



## *An Essay on Poetics*

lies on the breast of the sea. . . . There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Suffer me to touch thy body !

The prose of Lawrence inwraps one in the vibrant rhythm of passion so sinister and terrible that when this prose is read aloud the cadence has the hypnotic effect of the passion itself.

Then I remembered and took from my bosom the coloured light of that night before. I saw it was black and rough.

‘ Ah ! ’ said I, ‘ this is magic. ’

‘ The black stone ! ’ she wondered.

‘ It is the red light of the night before ’, I said.

‘ It is magic ’, she answered.

‘ Shall I throw it away ? ’ said I, lifting the stone, ‘ shall I throw it away, for fear ? ’

‘ It shines ! ’ she cried, looking up, ‘ it shines like the eye of a creature at night, the eye of a wolf in the doorway. ’

‘ ’Tis magic, ’ I said, ‘ let me throw it away from us ! ’

‘ It is red and shining ’, she cried.

‘ It is a bloodstone, ’ I answered. ‘ It will hurt us, we shall die in blood. ’

‘ But give it to me ’, she answered.

‘ It is red of blood ’, I said.

‘ Ah, give it to me ’, she called.

‘ It is my blood ’, I said.

‘ Give it ’, she commanded low.

‘ It is my life-stone ’, I said.

‘ Give it me ’, she pleaded.

I gave it her. . . .



## *An Essay on Poetics*

The excerpt is quoted in the form used in the Huebsch edition of *The Prussian Officer*. The lines are arranged merely after the canons directing the writing of direct discourse in prose; the excerpt is opposed to verse regardless of the extremely pronounced rhythm, certainly equal to that employed in most free verse, even that of Mr. Lawrence.

The fact remains that since free verse is not poetry because it does not accede to metre, the outstanding element in poetic form, this gyveless composition is merely chance production, harmful to the definiteness, significance, order, smoothness, and trueness of genuine art, and should not be brought forth as a monstrosity, a failure in the principle of design. The writer desiring to write and not desiring to use or not having a capable working knowledge of the established mechanics of poetry should attempt orthodox prose. However, as a matter of fact, experience has shown that an astounding number of people can write startling and, to the followers of the cultus, acceptable free verse, but an equally astounding number of equally intelligent people cannot write prose beyond that of the most mediocre type.

Along with their denial of metre, the writers of free verse and even those Moderns patronizing to a degree the traditional forms have instituted an acceptance of unpoetical words and expressions which has done much toward

## *An Essay on Poetics*

removing the significance and elegance from produced material displayed before the novice as poetry. There has ever been a nice line drawn between words which have a place in poetry and words which raucously proclaim themselves as entirely out of their own environment in any kind of really poetical composition. Mr. Arthur Symons in criticizing the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* calls attention to the fact that 'such intensely impressive touches as the quicklime which the prisoners see on the boots of the warders who have been digging the hanged man's grave, the "gardener's gloves" of the hangman and his "little bag" are, strictly speaking, fine prose, not poetry'. There is no order, pleasantness, and evenness in the vocabulary of the *hoi polloi*; there are surprises abortive to art in the use of words and phrases from that language, resonant of the unbound sphere of life, which is confused, raucous, and awry, and often meaningless, in the last analysis, relative to superbly vital things. One need only compare the diction of Rossetti or Tennyson with the crudeness of Whitman's indiscriminate selection of words for the expression of ideas in order to realize the gulf which lies between taste and lack of sensibility.

Walt Whitman is the *pièce de résistance* of the Moderns. Whitman played the usual childish part in literary experiment. After this his free verse constituted a defence mechanism against



## *An Essay on Poetics*

his ignorance of form and lack of patience and the scholar's or thorough artist's point of view, just as his songs of roughing it constituted a defence mechanism against his soft womanlike body and questionable biological adjustment. Whitman's writing, in spite of its tendency towards Rabelaisian 'delirious enumeration', is of value if only for the breaking over, in good part, from Hebraism to Hellenism. In breaking over, however, Whitman, through certain biological weaknesses, confused art and morals, and certainly, through lack of form, clung to the Hebraistic division in preference to unity, his very 'barbaric yawp' dividing itself into little but his far-claimed elemental, or free, dynamics.

To this very freedom, perhaps, poetry owes its somewhat startled acceptance of such words of appeal to the aesthetic sense as *pismire*, *sweat*, and *belching*. These are curiously effective when used with *thee*, *thou*, and verbs having the *-est* ending. And now, because of the tragic truth that nothing is static, not even freedom, some modern poetry and most modern effort become laden with *bathtubs*, *dishpans*, *cheap tin trays*, *handles of brooms*, and *train conductors*. Euphony is an item in poetical form. Beauty is harmony between the idea and its expression. Imagery with a bathtub, the onomatopoeia of a dishpan, lines run on by broom-handles and train conductors furnishing balance and division, so runs

## *An Essay on Poetics*

the world away in the hands of the Moderns. Art is required in even the commerce of words. Samuel Taylor Coleridge set a rule: '*prose*, words in their best order; *poetry*, the best words in the best order.'

There is a tendency to damn even the poetical terms, and *cliché*, high-sounding word that it is, has long been a focus of Modernist attack. Admitting the triteness of *pearly teeth*, *ship of state*, and *silvery moon*, we are a bit startled at some of the combinations which freedom has swept into verse. However, these are easily explained by the glib Modern. *Raw green of pickles*; *catsup kettle of gleaming copper*; *bland banks of cabbages*; *rabbit livered, blue with funk*; *laughed fit to kill*; *Pochantas' body...sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May*; *the waste-man's little daughter*,—this is the language of common speech, says the creed of the Imagists. No one denies the fact. Add to this the *stench of corpses rotting in front* of something, and you get the full odour of modernness. After all this, Miss Millay can still use *prithee*, and do it beautifully.

The modern advocate of the overthrowing of formal bonds in poetry contrary to his recklessness in word usage becomes dogmatically insistent upon heedfulness regarding compactness in the arrangement of words. 'Concentration is the very essence of poetry', and the apostles of the so-called new poetry point to Browning.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

Moderns have evidently failed to notice the *Ring and the Book*, with its dreary waste in long stretches, and his startling *One Word More*. Truly, Browning has much to answer for through some of his almost ridiculous condensation which offends sentence structure and other formalities native to the language. However, great names are exceedingly easy to conjure with. Through the process of identification the lesser cunningly hide behind the successful activity of the great. The failure of Browning and other real poets of distinction to handle meticulously the language rhetorically on occasion does not grant to every neophyte the privilege of wantonly distorting the principles of composition at will. Poetry has always granted an element of concentration, its very unity demanding a compactness not characteristic of, or possible in, prose. However, a combination of words complete as expressing a thought can exist only in the form of our recognized sentence. Certainly, fragments, with few admitted exceptions, are failures of the principle of design. Little is to be gained through concentration if the static elements of our language are broken down in that gaining. There is very little of the filling perfection of a Greek marble or a Mozart sonata in any composition bristling with fragments and bombastic exclamatory incompleteness.

Through their rejection of the basic element,

## *An Essay on Poetics*

metre, writers forfeit all right to call their chance production poetry. However, we see that in the case of most Moderns their forfeiture is multifold in that they have not only rejected metre but have distorted the traditional elements of euphony and poetical symbolism in language, and concentration. Future discussion will show, in addition, their mistaken conception of the value of true imagery. They have consistently scorned orthodox rime, and their very neglect of pattern makes artistic repetition of any type an impossibility. Of course, they may pretend to have set up some new elements to take the place of some of the traditional ones. Our conception of the process of making, or establishment, of form cannot allow us to take these mushroom growths seriously.

It has always been granted that one of the principal purposes of poetry was the manifestation of beauty, but just *how* beauty is disclosed seems a vague premise to writers and, usually, to readers in this part of our century. Should we momentarily suspend the proposition that beauty is harmony between the idea and its expression, there are seemingly two possible methods by which beauty may be conveyed in a poem: one, by the form; another, by the content as such.

Many of the Moderns have 'sought to empty the technique of poetry of all logical meaning and rational coherence; everything but the bare



## *An Essay on Poetics*

symbolism of words'.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, surely these particular writers can claim no showing of beauty through text or central idea. The obvious inference is to be drawn that if neither content nor form is present, the product must be only an abortive effort.

But enough of that class of would-be poets who offend all our elementary reasoning and every possibility of their actual existence! The remainder of the essay will be devoted to those Moderns who have the fervour of something to say, who desire a content to their efforts, who honour ideas, but do not realize or utilize form. There also follows admonition to the reader of poetry, he who cannot, or does not, translate form into its meaning for him. As regards both writers and readers of poetry, this is an age of extremes, and if one does not go too far in one direction, he is very liable to go distant in another.

As far as the long-accepted elements of poetic form are concerned, they have very definite meaning, and one of the higher functions of poetry is certain revelation of beauty through these elements, certain impartation which could not be accomplished by any other means.

In connexion with their dark rites of the sacrifice of the shape and structure of poetry, certain Moderns have taken Browning out of

<sup>1</sup> Abercrombie, Lascelles, *The Theory of Poetry*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

the hands of the women's clubs to serve occasionally as an example of one great poet who 'did not care about form'. Of course, the Moderns have never tried to say that Browning went so far as to totally disregard metre as such; they merely revel in his frequent neglect of elegance and thoroughness in metre, his carelessness in connexion with certain other elements of poetic form, and his oftentimes ridiculous condensation. Browning sets forth, so it is said, his theory of poetry in his earliest poem, *Pauline* :

And then thou said'st a perfect bard was one  
Who chronicled the stages of all life.

This may be loosely interpreted to mean that the poet felt that content was dominant and form, consequently, a trivial incidental. However, Browning's disregard for form has long been accepted by some of us as another of his charming paradoxes. He is a democrat in the *Lost Leader* and a rank imperialist in the *Cavalier Tunes*. The philosophy presented in the *Statue and the Bust*, that one of his appropriated philosophies so over-emphasized by his propounders, scarcely parallels equally profound precepts set forth in the *Bishop Orders his Tomb* and the *Grammarians' Funeral*. Perhaps he is only again wilfully self-contradictory when in one poem he disregards all semblance of conformation, and writes such a structure as:



## *An Essay on Poetics*

Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivell  
—Being—who?

and in another poem employs the orthodox caesura in a most intricate fashion and for a very definite reason. The following is quoted from Allan Abbott's paper entitled *Rhythm in Poetry*:<sup>1</sup>

'One can readily see that it is through skilful use of pause that Browning prevents *Evelyn Hope* from becoming a race instead of a funeral.

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead !  
Sit and watch by her side an hour.  
That is her bookshelf, this her bed ;  
She plucked that piece of geranium flower,  
Beginning to die too, in the glass.

One has to read the lines through to recognize the underlying anapaestic rhythm, which Browning could easily have regularized, had he wished, by putting in the missing syllables. But see the result :

Beautiful Evelyn Hopper is dead !  
Sit here and watch by her side for an hour.  
That is her bookshelf and this is her bed ;  
She plucked me that piece of geranium flower  
It scans perfectly now,—but it also gallops ; it  
might go on :

Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest  
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.'

Granted that a writer has something to say, the idea that content as a single whole is

<sup>1</sup> Abbott, Allan, 'Rhythm in Poetry', *Teachers' College Record*, xxviii. 687-8.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

dominant and form, consisting of all the elements which poetical form embraces, merely incidental in poetry is to be questioned, not only in regard to the writing of poetry but concerning the reading of all poetry. Certainly, we have Wordsworth's superb definition. 'Poetry', says Wordsworth, 'is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science.' However, this is an opinion and not a formula.

A Chinese poet<sup>1</sup> once voiced the sentiment that if ye desire to witness prodigies and to behold marvels, be not concerned as to whether the mountains are distant or the rivers far away. Concurrent with this bit of philosophy we may reason that the real marvels of a true poem may be lost through a rather absurd attempt at analysis of content as such. After all, form is form only that it may mean something definite, but that explicit significance may be a rhythmical response, an aesthetic reaction, or a testing of understanding judgement.<sup>2</sup> The element of euphony may mean abstract beauty through sound. A single poetical word or a group of fitting words may import an isolated pleasantness through connotation entirely unrelated to

<sup>1</sup> Kin-Kou-Ki-Koan.

<sup>2</sup> *In re* caesura. Caesura is a pause, a sense pause, which is dependent upon the phrasing of the verse. By varying the place of caesura the poet presents pleasing changes of modulation of sound and his verse gains in state of



## *An Essay on Poetics*

the poem's content as such. Imagery may convey perfectly clear, separately flashed pictures revealing surpassing beauty but not resting for assimilation in the process of analysis of content as a whole. Rime may be a partial substitute for music, which originally accompanied all poetry, or it may indicate binding and regularity.

George Santayana states that art is abstract and inconsequential. 'Nothing concerns it less than to influence the world', but in revealing beauty it gives us the best hint of the ultimate good which life offers.

The academic attitude which makes and takes thoughts for learning's sake and which lacks all imagination, must not be superimposed to too great an extent upon the artist attitude, or else we have a startled chorus of woe as sung by the spirits in *Faust*.

It is possible for our approach to poetry to be as ridiculous as the motto of Carroll's Duchess: 'Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves.' The old pliability. Note the use of caesura in the following passage from Milton:

This deep world  
Of darkness do we dread? || How oft amidst  
Thick clouds and dark || doth Heaven's all-ruling Sire  
Choose to reside, || His glory unobscured,  
And with the majesty of darkness round  
Covers His throne; || from whence deep thunders roar  
Must'ring their rage, || and Heaven resembles Hell?

## *An Essay on Poetics*

myth of content hangs like a pall over the benefits of all literature. We are so blinded by getting at the often false bottom of the thing under discussion that the revelation of beauty becomes precipitated with commonplace supposed influence along lines concrete and pompous, and the entire hint of ultimate good falls through the bottom.

This hint of beauty giving us glimpses of the ultimate good which life offers is often only a simple singing, a call through words to a flow of musical inflections and modulations regular, but so fragile as to break under content questioning. In the threnode of the lad who comes

. . . home to Ludlow  
Amidst the moonlight pale ;<sup>1</sup>

in the isolated connotations and in the tones of

With rue my heart is laden  
For golden friends I had.<sup>2</sup>

we find this infinite singing and a design of the insurmountable beauty of sadness luminous of all the pathos of youth and love and fate, momentary and alone, above and tremulously detached from facts and analyses of the broad general thought and meaning.

The final thesis is not that any poem dare exist without meaning, but that no poem which

<sup>1</sup> Housman, Alfred Edward, *A Shropshire Lad*, Holt, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



## *An Essay on Poetics*

is constructed by the elements of poetic form does exist without multiple significance. It is to safeguard the finer meanings, those resultant of form, that a too acute academic attitude towards what the poem is about is discouraged.

Beauty, to be sure, is harmony between the idea and its expression. Nevertheless, in intelligently reading poetry certain gratifying reactions result, with a seeming partial neglect of predominant idea. Some scholars have held, and do hold, that poetry can exist, and beautifully, with form as its chief requisite. Many of us are fascinated by Poe's *Ulalume*. We have read it aloud hundreds of times and fairly hypnotized ourselves with its voluptuous rhythm. We admit a certain physical thrill out of the mere mouthing of

At the end of our path a liquescent  
And nebulous lustre was born.

We discover that to this very moment we have never even wondered what it was all about. Doubtlessly, now, most of us would not care to know the content as such if there is any of significance.

We never try to grasp the meaning of the odour of violets or the cooing of doves, and the glory of much poetry, if not much of the glory of all poetry, lies in the same kind of ineffable beauty. Swinburne's *Sapphics*, along with most of his poems and ballads, through

## *An Essay on Poetics*

analysation, long has been a target for virtuous indignation. The entire poem is like the wind-swept *motif* from the strings of an aeolian harp, and should have little more attention directed towards its content as a whole than that which could be spent in attaching a meaning to the winging of his doves.

Then to me so lying awake a vision  
Came without sleep over the seas and touched me,  
Softly touched mine eyelids and lips; and I too  
Full of the vision

Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,  
Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled  
Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;  
Saw the reluctant

Feet, the straining plumes of the doves that drew  
her,  
Looking always, looking with necks reverted,  
Back to Lesbos, back to the hills where under  
Shone Mitylene. . . .

The great things of nature, of life, flitted through Swinburne's mind as a phantasmagoria. Most great beauty rests nowhere. Poetically, it is of more importance that there are eight indications of the effects of brightness in the first nine lines of *Tristram of Lyonesse* than that the ultimate meaning of the entire poem is tediously obscure. Swinburne's virtue as a poet lies in his conquest of form. R. H. Stoddard says that Swinburne knew 'the great secret



## *An Essay on Poetics*

which underlies all great poetry—the compulsion of discords into harmonies'.<sup>1</sup>

That metre may have a distinct meaning expressed directly is most strikingly exemplified in those poems the movement of which actually measures out articulately the particular activity set forth by the author. There is substantiality aside from cleared content in Goethe's *Erlkönig*; in fact, one who does not understand German can grasp the situation of a wild ride from an intelligent reader's oral rendition of the poem. A like manifestation exists in Browning's *How They Brought the Good News*. One hears the galloping tramp of the horse-hoof shaking the crumbling plain in the Latin verse,

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.<sup>2</sup>

The metres of Kipling's *Boots* accomplish much without an explication of text. A like situation exists in *La Marseillaise*. The emotional substantiality in metre in its relation to content is so obvious as to demand but mere mention. The strength and majesty of *Paradise Lost* is set in the very resounding of Milton's insurpassable blank verse, and the emotional scope of the poem is defined within the reader's reaction to that mighty beaten sonority which

<sup>1</sup> Stoddard, R. H., *Selections from the Poetical Works of A. C. Swinburne*, Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.

<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book VIII, line 596.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

establishes a plane as the bell does in Rubenstein's *Kammenoi-Ostrow*. 'What would be left in prose, any prose, of Goethe's own *Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*'?'<sup>1</sup> In Browning's *Home Thoughts from Abroad* the different metrical patterns flashing the fleeting mental pictures of an English Spring are indicative of the entire psychological process which the poem mirrors. The particular metrical plan of Vicaire's *Le Cimetière de campagne* with its characteristic fourth verse in each stanza gives the poem that maturity and freedom from pomposity and inflation which make it so astoundingly more vital as a poem about death than are those dreary poems in the English language, significant of the reformation, Gray's *Elegy* and the unspeakable *Psalm of Life*.

In the *Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples* (Shelley) the example is very perfect, and it should be observed how definitely the successive stages of the mood, as it disengages itself from the scene and becomes purely personal and human, are held each within the limits of the stanza, and how the orderly development of the mood as it rises and falls away is accomplished by means of the stanzaic structure.<sup>2</sup>

Poems of Herrick and Suckling tinkle like a harpsichord. The emotion set is a substantiality without which what is said in a poem would

<sup>1</sup> Gummere, Francis B., *Beginnings of Poetry*.

<sup>2</sup> Woodberry, George E., *The Appreciation of Literature*.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

avail little. 'I felt', says Rousseau, 'before I thought; it is the common lot of humanity.'

A fine and fitting *rhythm* flows through poetry after a correct *metre* has been established,<sup>1</sup> usually for the purpose of conveying a definite meaning. Coleridge's *Christabel* is obviously planned in iambic tetrameter, and yet through variety in uniformity the very versification becomes part of the sentiment of the poem.

'Everything is diversified according to the demand of the moment, of the sounds, the sights, the emotions; the very uniformity of the outline is gently varied; and yet we feel that the whole is one and of the same character. . . . I know of no very fine versification unaccompanied with fine poetry; no poetry of a mean order with verse of the highest.'<sup>2</sup>

There is not wind enough in the air

To move away the ringlet curl

From the lovely lady's cheek—

There is not wind enough to twirl

The one red leaf, the last of its clan,

That dances as often as dance it can,

Hanging so light and hanging so high

On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

The first four verses are unmistakably iambic, but so much variation is brought in in the

<sup>1</sup> Note statement on page 15: 'If, in general, rhythm aside from metre is a poetical tenet, it is only secondary to, and superimposed upon, metre.'

<sup>2</sup> Cook, A. S., *Leigh Hunt's 'What is Poetry?'*, Ginn & Co.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

remaining lines that we are puzzled until we hear and feel, introduced into the formal pattern of the whole, the very light, rhythmically typical dancing of the one red leaf.

The flexible Greek language gave poets wonderful opportunity to allow the very rhythm and sound to mirror definite emotions and perceptions. Swinburne's poems attest to the power of Sappho, whose works show a quality perhaps the most beautiful ever produced in language. The very '*Thalatta, Thalatta*', the shout of the foremost of the Greeks when they saw the Mediterranean on their great so-called *anabasis*, is in itself the very sound of the sea. The terribleness of the clang of the mighty bow along with the shivering of its string is heard in

Dinā de clangā genet' argyreoio bioio <sup>1</sup>

And terrible was the clang of the silver bow.

The metre is significant. *Clanga* itself clangs, and the diphthongs vibrate like the bow thong.

There is in the Chinese a set of four verses from the *Chi-King*:

Khiû tchî yîng-yîng.  
Toû tchî hoûng-hoûng.  
Tchô tchî tông-tông.  
Siô liú pîng-pîng.

In the metre of this there is the beating of gongs, the singing of chant, the song of builders

<sup>1</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, Book I, line 49.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

building the dwellings of the dead. Onomatopoeia aids in definiteness. *Hoûng-hoûng* are the sounds heard in the timber-yards where the wood is being measured; from the workshops of the builders respond the sounds of *tông-tông*; the solid walls when fully finished off give out the sound of *pîng-pîng*.

It must not be concluded that metre has a definite dominant voice only in direct adaptation to thought and in connexion with onomatopoeia. Imagery, euphony, and poetic symbolism in language are almost invariably in immediate association with certain metre in the direct impression of emotional coherence.

The element of imagery is dismissed by six Imagists in this manner: 'We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous.'<sup>1</sup> By this statement they depart from real imagery, which is the creation of individual pictures suggesting more than they actually show in crude colour; they take away from poetry the element of imagination, the 'imaginative expression' of which Wordsworth speaks.

It is often possible to take from a poem one or more verses involving true imagery and from a passing reading of these verses receive more filling beauty than could possibly be found

<sup>1</sup> Lowell, Amy, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, The Macmillan Company.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

in the 'purpose', 'gist', or supposed ethical 'influence' of the whole.

Tennyson was a close, almost a scientific, observer of Nature. He is an artist of Nature rather than an interpreter. His *Recollections of the Arabian Nights* is a series of pictures of the Tigris as it goes by. The *Lady of Shalott* is a series of sensuous images akin to those in *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*. The *Lotos-eaters* presents little and perfect word-paintings. His description of a blind man in poem LXVI of *In Memoriam* is one of the finest artistic touches in English literature. His pictures are not only complete in their individuality and possible detachment from logical analysis of content, but they are filled with a further imaginative expression from which one can find additional meaning.

Four verses from Browning's *Apparitions* deal in the crudest of primary colours, terminate in the flowers of Sappho, and through imagery and metre arouse all the innate imagination of any sensitive person :

Such a starved bank of moss  
Till, that May-morn,  
Blue ran the flash across :  
Violets were born !

That gorgeous Mortlake tapestry, Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes*, the first four stanzas of Elizabeth Barrett's *Musical Instrument*, portions of Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*—there is no end



## *An Essay on Poetics*

to the imagery in poetry. The very use of colour by poets is in itself a revelation of their powers of imagery. Chaucer knew the colour of every feather in Chanticleer. He goes into the nicest detail in his description of a very small and insignificant thing :

. . . The smallë fishes bright  
With finnës red, and scalës of silver white.

The unsubstantial form and colour of a fairy dreamland in Spenser's *Arcadia* give that place the tone of Arcadia and not the colour of a north England scene. Tennyson knew the box of colours as any landscape painter knows it. Shelley's poetry has been called the most *luminous* in the language. Swinburne plies neutral grays, greens, and violets, and much crude white which is ordinarily shunned by painters except those of the most consummate ability.

In 1923, Miss Louise Bogan, writing in the sonnet form, made a poem so lovely as to take the breath, and cause, as Emily Dickinson put it, 'the top of one's head to come off' :

A macaw preens upon a branch outspread  
With jewellery of seed. He's deaf and mute.  
The sky behind him splits like gorgeous fruit  
And claw-like leaves clutch light till it has bled.  
The raw diagonal bounty of his wings  
Scrapes on the eye colour too chafed. He beats  
A flattered tail out against gauzy heats ;  
He has the frustrate look of cheated kings.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

And all the simple evening passes by :  
A gillyflower spans its little height  
And lovers with their mouths press out their grief.  
The bird fans wide his striped regality,  
Prismatic, while against a sky breath-white  
A crystal tree lets fall a crystal leaf.<sup>1</sup>

Here is a revelation of beauty not embodied in the meaning of the poem as a whole, but in the mere disclosure of design formed of colours and lights, the music of singing, and free associations. This poem is beautiful because of its form : its significant metres, orderly balance and division, imagery, euphony, poetic symbolism in language, and singing, regulating rime. Surely the full import of a poem is not that one cleared unit of thought crystallizing what the poet has to say to influence humankind.

Euphony must have been in the mind of Coleridge when he said : '*poetry*, the best words in the best order'. Agreeable sound as well as aesthetic connotation makes a word good for use in poetry. The mere substitution of *Jim*, *Lizzie*, *Annie*, *Joshua*, and *Kate* for *Lancelot*, *Ygerne*, *Auguisant of Erin*, and '*Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent*' will prove the value of euphony in poetry. *Cameliard* is more beautiful than *Chicago*, even without the connotation. Tennyson's names will do much to open magic

<sup>1</sup> Bogan, Louise, 'Decoration', *Body of this Death*, Robert M. McBride & Co.



## *An Essay on Poetics*

casements if they become appreciable to readers of poetry.

There is a particularly marked euphony which arises from vowel-sounds. In vowels the element of tone, though modified and differentiated by positions of the mouth-organs, is predominant. The word *vowel* comes from the Latin *vocalis*, sounding, sonorous. The mellifluence and flexibility of vowelly language is obvious in the song of Gareth:

O dewy flowers that open to the sun,  
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,  
Blow sweetly : twice my love hath smiled on me.

As early as the second century B.C., the Greek grammarians had designated *l, m, n, r* as liquids, consonants having a decided smoothness and euphonicalness. In three extremely harmonious verses from Swinburne's *Hendecasyllabics* we have a total of sixty consonants. Twenty-one of these are liquids. It is small wonder that the lines read in sweet sound soothing to the ear :

In the month of the long decline of roses,  
I, beholding the summer dead before me,  
Set my face to the sea, and journeyed silent. . . .

In connexion with metre, rhythm, imagery, and euphony and their direct revelations of beauty, singly or in combination, is the poetic symbolism in language. The following discussion is from Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie's *Theory of Poetry*.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

‘It (poetic symbolism in language) is often unmistakable enough: and chiefly when words are made to impress our imaginations without any precise logical coherence.’ Citing the dirge from *The Two Noble Kinsmen* of Shakespeare and Fletcher, Mr. Abercrombie continues: ‘The logic of that is not very apparent; but as a verbal symbol of lamentation it is the very thing. The suggestion of its images, the sound of its syllables, the expansion of its feeling produce an emotional coherence which we do not have to understand: it comes home to us directly, instinct with meaning we need not analyse.’ This gentleman from the University of Leeds further points out that the refrain in William Morris’s *Red Roses* says nothing reasonable but stands as the perfect symbol of the enchanted mood of the poet’s youth; that the mere music of the words in a lyrical dialogue from Peele’s *Arraignement of Paris*, ‘however little sense they have, is a sufficient symbol of the delicious fresh gaiety which Peele had in his mind’.

‘But neither the Elizabethans nor the romantics thought that this purely illogical symbolism, whether of meaning or of sound, would supply by itself a sufficient technique for poetry. Such a belief has, however, been not only asserted, but practised. It is a signal instance of the danger of theories which declare what poetry ought to be. This theory alleges, that since



## *An Essay on Poetics*

poetry in its use of language must anyhow be symbolic, the more obvious and ostentatious its symbolism, the better it must be as poetry. Accordingly, the symbolist poets of France—led by a man of genius, Mallarmé, and aped by a horde of camp-followers, the Futurists and Imagists—sought to empty the technique of poetry of all logical meaning and rational coherence; everything but the bare symbolism of words. This absurd and arbitrary restriction not only limits our imaginations to the regions of the clouds, and makes us, even among the exquisite clouds of Mallarmé's vague but many-coloured mind, yearn for clear light and clean outline; it actually restricts the suggestive power of words themselves, the power which the symbolists chiefly rely on commanding.'

Rime is one of those elements which makes a poem more beautiful than any re-telling in prose could possibly be. A certain amount of rime is found to be a necessity in all poetry except blank verse. Through the failure of poets in handling blank verse, we have come to regard rime as an essential to all poetry except that written in iambic pentameter and not divided into stanzas. Blank verse has grown into the definition: iambic pentameter unrimed. Some blank verse has been written in dactyls, six to the line, and in trochees, four to the line, but with little success. To be sure rime is an artifice, but so are most of the significant fine features of the



## *An Essay on Poetics*

art of gentle living. As far as the term *artificial* is concerned, it is only relative in the last analysis. The Japanese and, for that matter, the French, have seen Nature beautiful in the extreme only when trained and pruned, arranged and regulated by the hand of man. It would be a raw civilization which had no artifices, perhaps such a condition in social culture as that found in present-day Russia. All conventions are artificial. Of course, those persons not knowing conventions cannot appreciate artifice. Those very absurd traditional conventions of the opera which make that particular art the more charming to the habitué and initiate seem stupid in the extreme to the novice. Rime is an artful contrivance, but certainly it is no more unnecessary in its decorative function in poetry than are our collars, cravats, hat-bands, extra buttons, and cuffs, our beads, bows, coiffures, pleats, and embroideries, our silks, misty tweeds, and velvets in daily dress. Last remaining vestige of exalted or lyrical music which once accompanied all poetry, the singing of rime keeps real verse above the level of mere prose. In addition to remaining the subsidiary part accompanying the poem, and to standing as the most vivid decorative element of verse, rime in its various patterns binds the lines into a unit for regularity, aids in emphasis, and appears and reappears as a *motif* does in music.

Artistic repetition by rime, refrain, single



## *An Essay on Poetics*

word, verse, or verses is a rhythmical element of poetry; it is a binding element in any case, and a most pleasing contribution to order, force, and musical quality. Artistic repetition is best seen in the composition of music. If we look at the index of a collection of Beethoven's sonatas, we find the page number of the *Sonata Pathétique* (Op. 13) given opposite a reproduction of the principal *motif*:



At the sonata proper we find this *motif* introduced and re-introduced, interwoven, embellished, and changed as to key. Upon hearing the sonata we learn to listen for the repetition of this most effective passage of music, to realize that the recurrence of this *motif* is the very life of the composition.

Such periodical recurrence appears in poetry through the manipulation of certain specified lines in certain set poem patterns. This can be seen in the ballade, chant royal, pantoum, rondeau, rondeau redoublé, rondel, roundel, sestina, triolet, and villanelle. Perhaps the most ingenious repetition is that found in the triolet, that delightful device for playful slyness, once so popular with the French.

The majority of the poetry in the English language is not of that type following the set

## *An Essay on Poetics*

poem patterns; however, in our poetry many types of repetition are employed. The repetitions of line-length and pattern, and of rime are, of course, outstanding. The refrain and the chorus serve in this capacity. A single word may ring through a poem, setting the tone of the verse, as the word *silver* does in Walter de la Mare's poem of that name. Poe's *Ulalume* portrays the singing quality of the repetition of verses. In this poem the third verse of each stanza re-sings the melody of the second verse; the eighth, of the sixth; the ninth, of the seventh. Only those changes have been made which accentuate the beauty of the original line.

And now, as the night was senescent  
And star-dials pointed to morn,  
As the star-dials hinted of morn,  
At the end of our path a liquescent  
And nebulous lustre was born,  
Out of which a miraculous crescent  
Arose with a duplicate horn,  
Astarte's bediamonded crescent  
Distinct with its duplicate horn.

Form is established in an indisputable process of making, and through this type of establishment is the very antithesis of all chance. Art to be genuine follows established form.

The empty days and lives of humanity need a filling orderliness, a meaning, supplied them. Beauty alone can satisfy without satiation. 'The



## *An Essay on Poetics*

most useful man in the most useful world, so long as only commodity was served, would remain unsatisfied. But, as fast as he sees beauty, life acquires a very high value.'<sup>1</sup> The individual acquires beauty in direct proportion to what he knows and experiences; therefore, he must not mistake untruths for beauty and originality.

Along with the other arts and the humanities, through a misconception of beauty and originality, poetry has suffered heavy deprivation at the hands of the Moderns. Rhythm, which is a universal element, frequently has been, and is, substituted for metre, a purely poetical constituent; a false logic pretends that certain writing, assuredly not poetry, is too rhythmical for prose. Unpoetical language has been admitted to so-called poetry; over-concentration bids to destroy the basic canons of the Language. Form has been routed; chance, admitted.

This situation is void of intelligence. The chief argument for established form is that its very elements stimulate beauty which nothing else could rouse. '*La Vérité consiste dans les nuances.*'<sup>2</sup> Metre, rhythm, imagery, euphony, poetic symbolism in language, rime, and repetition, all as defined according to orthodox canons, offer separate and direct meaning free of and

<sup>1</sup> Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Beauty*.

<sup>2</sup> Renan.

## *An Essay on Poetics*

aside from a poem's actual content as such, its theme, central idea, and text in general.

Browning, of all people, sums up the situation in about the best possible way. He may have spent his life making other people exhibit their own individual souls, but he allows Fra Lippo to say:

If you get simple beauty and naught else  
You get about the best thing God invents.



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